

Care, common sense can foil the forgers

By Roger Boye

AFTER PINCHING pennies for more than a year, an Evanston collector saved enough money to buy a 1909-S VDB, the lowest mintage coin in the Lincoln cent series.

But instead of ordering the rare coin from a dealer, the man developed "a case of cold feet" that's not related to the bitter weather.

"I'm worried about getting stuck with a fake coin. Is it possible to protect myself?" the man asked.

Hobby experts have a ready answer to that common question. If the Evanston hobbyist uses care and common sense when buying the rare Lincoln cent, he won't be swindled by a coin forger.

"The first thing I tell collectors is to watch out for the bargains. So many people buy a coin simply because it is cheap," said Ed Fleischmann, one of two coin authenticators for the American Numismatic Association's Certification Service (ANACS). An inexpensive 1909-S VDB cent might really be a common 1909 VDB cent with a fake "S" mint mark soldered to the coin.

As an additional precaution, the Evanston collector could compare the letters and numbers on a suspect 1909-S VDB cent with those on a genuine coin. If they don't match, the suspect coin may be a fake, Fleischmann said.

For example, the "S" mint mark on an authentic 1909-S VDB cent has two equally sized serifs (short lines at each end of the "S") that are parallel to each other. Most of the fakes have "S" mint marks with a poorly shaped

lower serif, no serifs at all, or serifs that are not parallel.

Other rare coins, such as the 1932-D quarter, have similar distinctive characteristics. The mint mark on most genuine 1932-D quarters appears smeared and seems to sit in a groove, the result of worn machinery used at the United States Mint during the Depression. Quarters from 1932 with sharp, clear mint marks are suspect.

Fleischmann and other experts have more suggestions for would-be rare coin buyers:

- With a powerful magnifying glass, closely examine the date of a coin for altered digits.
- Beware of mint marks that appear different in color from the coin itself.
- Don't assume a coin is genuine just because it looks nice.
- Know the person or dealer with whom you do business, or patronize well-established dealers.

An almost sure-fire way to determine if a coin is authentic is to send it to ANACS. Fleischmann or John Hunter, the other authenticator, will examine it, using sophisticated equipment, die records, etc. If the coin is authentic, a certificate and picture of the coin are sent. If the coin is a fake, the owner is so told.

For forms and schedule of fees (about 3 per cent of a coin's value), write ANACS, 818 N. Cascade Av., Colorado Springs, Colo. 80903.

A former ANACS authenticator, Charles Hoskins, now runs a similar service for the International Numismatic Society. For information, write INS Authentication Bureau, P.O. Box 19386, Washington, D.C. 20036.



... this is the real one. The fake has an added "S" soldered to the coin. A magnifying glass can detect such tampering.